



REEF CHECK AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

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New database sheds light on the health of our coral

Our coral reefs are dying, there's mass bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef, there will be no habitat for Grey Nurse Sharks by 2022...or will there?

Now, anyone with an internet connection can find out for themselves thanks to a new online coral health database, launched today by award-winning coral monitoring organisation, Reef Check Australia (RCA).

The data collected by highly-trained volunteer divers cover 81 sites across Queensland coasts, from Osprey Reef up in the Coral Sea to Palm Beach Reef down on the Gold Coast.

Speaking ahead of the Australian Coral Reef Society Symposium in Darwin last month, as the database made its debut, Science Operations Manager at Reef Check Australia Dr Marie-Lise Schläppy said the database collated up to eight years of data, gathered by divers scouring the reefs in small teams and recording their findings on underwater slates.

"The database takes the form of an interactive map-search display, allowing visitors to click on particular sites of interest and view summary reports of the data collected," she said. "It's a far more user-friendly experience than the traditional spreadsheet data."

"The so-called 'stratified haphazard' sampling technique is well recognised scientifically and is an excellent way to trace changes in reef health over time. It can provide a valuable early-warning system in the case of serious impacts to the reef, such as coral bleaching."

Alongside support from Coastcare, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is a major funder of the new database, which will be a useful supplement to other reef health monitoring efforts it supports.

The new database means RCA's volunteers can look at the data they've helped to collect and understand more about the valuable commitment they're making to science. Researchers, students and other interested parties will also be able to request permission to access the full series of raw data for use in their own projects.

Australian Marine Park Tourism Operators Executive Director, Col McKenzie says: "This new tool allows our members to see the real results of the research they make possible by providing in-kind berth space for the survey teams".

The data provided by the new RCA database include records of substrate cover (e.g. coral, sponge, rock); incidences of coral damage, bleaching and disease; plus counts of key fish and invertebrate species. Also featured in the reports are live photographs taken at the site during surveys. These include the research site landscape, any damaging impacts, and important creatures discovered.

RCA's database is the most instantaneous public information source on Australia's coral health – each survey's results are online within a week. The reports should make interesting reading. See them at reefcheckaustralia.org/data.html.

For information and images, contact: Gemma Routledge, Marketing & Communications 0428987457.

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Reef Check Australia

Reef Check Australia is an award-winning, not-for-profit organisation combining education and research to result in the protection and rehabilitation of the world's coral reefs. Established in 2001 by one passionate individual with a strong vision, the charity has inspired over 100 volunteers to train using a scientifically standardised protocol in established monitoring techniques and now collects and distributes valuable data on reef health to marine resource managers and the wider scientific community. This data can provide vital early-warnings of a decline in reef health.

With a professional approach and recognised integrity, Reef Check Australia works in collaboration with community and industry partners to raise awareness, both locally and further afield through education and participation programs, about the effects of climate change and human impacts on the resilience of the reef.

Support from a number of industry professionals, along with some valued sponsors and several hard-working volunteers all make our current projects possible but, in order to succeed in our mission, we need to do more. As a charitable organisation, donors can make fully tax-deductable gifts to help Reef Check Australia take positive action towards reaching environmentally sound and economically sustainable solutions to the real challenges of coral reef conservation.

Our Mission:

To promote healthy local coral reefs through scientific research, community education and marine conservation.

Objectives:

To ensure a sustainable future for the Australian and Indo-Pacific region's coral reef ecosystems by:

- 1) The generation and publication of select coral reef data that is highly valued by scientists and marine managers.
- 2) The establishment of reef monitoring programs that are accessible to a wide range of the population and yet still produce valuable data.
- 3) The establishment of a coral reef health database for Australia and the Indo-Pacific region that is integrated in to the global Reef Check network.
- 4) For the majority of Australian adults and children to understand the importance of coral reefs and be able to tell you what they can do to help protect them.
- 5) Development and implementation of cutting edge training programs to enhance the value of the data collected by volunteers.
- 6) Quality marine-based education programs for local communities.
- 7) Meaningful participation by local communities in the promotion and maintenance of coral reefs through Reef Check Australia programs or use of the database.
- 8) Promotion of the sustainable use of coral reefs through partnerships with governments, researchers, businesses and community groups.
- 9) Raising public awareness of the economic, ecological and social value of coral reefs.
- 10) Promotion of the Reef Check Australia brand.
- 11) Financial sustainability of Reef Check Australia.

For more information or to get involved check out our website at www.reefcheckaustralia.org.

For further press information and high res images please contact Gemma Routledge at Reef Check Australia via email, communications@reefcheckaustralia.org or telephone 0428 987 457.